

Are Louisiana's coastal recreational waters safe for people?

BE AWARE that the water bodies you and your family use are never risk free.

The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health advises people to swim at their own risk. The standards developed by the Environmental Protection Agency only allows for 19 illnesses per 1,000 swimmers, and the Louisiana Beach Monitoring Program observes these standards.

Remember, the potential for illness is always there. However, you can reduce your risk by following these precautions:

- Avoid ingesting or swallowing the water
- Minimize immersing your head when swimming
- Avoid swimming with an open cut or sore
- Shower after swimming
- Do not swim in areas with warnings against swimming
- Look for trash and other signs of pollution such as oil slicks in the water. These kinds of pollutants may indicate the presence of disease-causing microorganisms that may have been washed into the water.

Enjoying Louisiana's Coastal Beach Waters

*A Health Safety Guide
from the Louisiana
Department of Health
and Hospitals, Office
of Public Health*

This brochure was developed by the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health in cooperation with the Environmental Protection Agency for the people of Louisiana.



While swimming in Louisiana's coastal (marine/ river mouth) waters, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health, advises people to swim at their own risk.

In many ways, water could be considered Louisiana's greatest natural resources. Louisiana waterways provide a great playground for swimming, wading, boating, fishing, water skiing and other outdoor activities.

This brochure provides information on coastal waters, the potential health effects of polluted waters and ways to reduce the risk of you or your family becoming sick after swimming at Louisiana's coastal beaches.

How will I know when the water meets safety criteria?

The Department of Health and Hospitals has joined with the Office of State Parks to post signs that alert people to the condition of the beach waters. These signs can be found near the point of access to the beach.

The signs look like the example at the right and they will be placed where the beach is monitored.

Prior to visiting a beach, citizens also can visit the DHH-OPH Web site to find out about water quality at:

www.ophbeachmonitoring.com

When a swimming advisory is in effect, the sign will be opened, as shown at the right bottom.

What is in the water that can make people sick?

The water may look good, but it may contain disease-causing microorganisms and chemicals. These microorganisms can make you and your family sick.

What kinds of illnesses do these microorganisms cause?

Swimming or playing in water with disease-causing microorganisms can cause illnesses such as sore throats or gastroenteritis, an intestinal infection that can cause diarrhea, cramps and vomiting. Children, the elderly or people with a weakened immune system (for instance, people receiving chemotherapy or people with AIDS) are at greater risk of getting sick when swimming in waters that contain disease-causing microorganisms.

These microorganisms enter the body through the mouth, nose and ears. Therefore, swallowing the water or dunking your head underwater increases the risk of illness.

Are Louisiana's coastal waters tested for microorganisms?

Yes, but tests are done only for bacteria associated with fecal matter and excrement. Similar organisms occur naturally, but elevated numbers of these organisms are associated with human or animal waste being present in the water. These types of bacteria indicate the possibility that harmful bacteria are present. Pollution levels can vary from day to day, and high levels of bacteria will prompt an advisory. Follow-up tests will indicate the soonest possible return to safe conditions.

How do these disease-causing microorganisms get into the water?

Many disease-causing organisms come from human and animal waste. These enter the water from sources such as sewage overflows, polluted storm

water runoff, sewage treatment plant malfunctions, urban and rural runoff after a rain, boating waste, malfunctioning individual sewage treatment systems and agricultural runoff.

The problem is magnified whenever it rains and runoff overloads sewer systems. In urban areas, this results in sewage overflow and sewage treatment malfunctions, causing raw animal and human waste to be released into coastal waters and their tributaries.

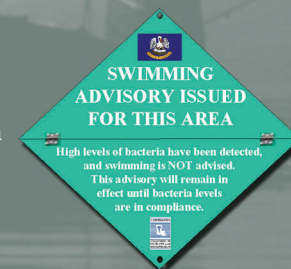
Are Louisiana's coastal recreational waters tested?

There is no routine testing program for chemical pollution. A small number of water bodies have been tested. Because of the chemical test results, fish consumption and swimming advisories have been placed on several bodies of water in Louisiana.

Advisories will change with new information and will be available to everyone from both the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals.



Sign displayed when no warning is in effect.



Sign displayed during an issued advisory.